



County of Santa Cruz

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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December 8, 2015 Received & Inspected

DEC 17 2015

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

FCC Mail Room

Dear Commissioners:

A recent California Field Poll showed that over 1 in 5 California households lack broadband access with a disproportionate number of those households consisting of seniors, those with low-incomes and adults self-identifying as having a disability. Similar challenges exist in Santa Cruz County. The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors has taken a nationally-recognized role in local government broadband policy development. These actions were necessitated by the lack of adequate coverage and the growing need for broadband access for business, school, health and non-profit needs. However, even as broadband access and speed begins to improve in our area, in part due to our Board's work, there are still members in our community that are priced out of this essential service.

For context, 92 percent of households nationwide with incomes between \$100,000 and \$150,000 have broadband service, while only 47 percent of households making less than \$25,000 a year access these technologies. Much of the problem stems from cost, and until recently policies at the federal level have mandated that telecommunications companies ensure access through low-cost programs such as Lifeline. Currently, Lifeline provides a discount on monthly telephone service to qualified households. The changes being considered by the FCC will include broadband under the umbrella of qualifying services and thus provide opportunities for our most vulnerable to access modern data transmission capabilities. Put simply, regardless of the fact that that our County is now becoming more wired many will still be priced out of this essential tool.

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In today's world, it is nearly impossible to apply for a job, access health care information, or submit many school assignments without Internet access. This potential FCC change will help bridge that gap. The California Emerging Technology Fund has submitted comments to the FCC to encourage a Broadband Lifeline Program that ensures low-income households have access to the Internet while still maintaining the current telephone Lifeline program. A Broadband Lifeline Program will provide the opportunity for many unconnected seniors and low-income residents of Santa Cruz County access to the Internet.

If we are to continue our efforts to create an environment where people can live and work in our county, where our children have access to better educational opportunities, and our workforce can continue to improve their professional skills, it is important that the changes envisioned by the Federal Communications Commission be adopted. Such an action will help bridge the digital divide and ensure that Internet access is not limited to just those with the financial means to afford it.

Therefore, the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors writes in support of the Federal Communications Commission's efforts to reform and modernize the Lifeline and Link Up programs (WC Docket No. 11-42).

Sincerely,



GREG CAPUT, Chairman
Board of Supervisors

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